

TO: Monte Rauser
FROM: Roger Rostvet
RE: Earlier pheasant opener

Issue: The traditional opening date for the North Dakota pheasant hunting season is the second Saturday in October. It was proposed by commercial interests that the opener be moved to the first Saturday in October.

Why:

1. An earlier season would make for a longer season. This would allow businesses in the prime pheasant range, mainly southwestern North Dakota, to have a longer business season. Motels, restaurants and fee hunting operations plus other related businesses could benefit financially.
2. North Dakota hunters would have more days of pheasant hunting prior to the arrival of our often very tough winters.

Why Not:

1. Many hunters traditionally make opening weekend a special event. The waterfowl opener, by federal regulation, usually falls on the Saturday closest to October 1. This means that some years (2003, 2004, 2005, 2009 and 2010) the waterfowl and pheasant season would open the same day. This means that the number of trips that resident and nonresident hunters make to our rural hunting areas would be reduced significantly. From this perspective it is probably best to have two weeks between openers. More hunters will be able to do both.
2. Some consider our current opening date to be too early. Row crops are not harvested and the birds are not mature. Identification of immature roosters can be difficult. Complaints about this are common with our current opener.
3. Game and Fish law enforcement support for these seasons will be reduced significantly when season openers coincide. We have a set number of game wardens. The number of hunters in the field on a weekend when both pheasant and waterfowl seasons open will be considerably higher than if the seasons open on different weekends.
4. Currently there is a controversy raging over the commercialization of North Dakota's wildlife resource and resident hunter may perceive this as providing guides, outfitters, and fee hunting operations with special considerations that will increase these activities that

they feel are in direct competition with there expectations of hunting.

Game and Fish Suggested Alternative: (This option has been chosen) Rather than move the opener to the first Saturday in October, move it to the first Saturday after the waterfowl opener. This provides for an earlier opener some years and eliminates the conflict with the waterfowl opener entirely. Example: For 2002 with a Sept. 28 waterfowl opener, the pheasant opener would be Oct. 5. Under current practice the opener would be on Oct. 12. This would over time provide for an average three and one-half day earlier season. Biologically the pheasant resource would not be significantly impacted, hunters can shoot only birds that can be identified as roosters. In 1994 the opener was Oct. 8 and in 1999 it was Oct. 9, this occurred without serious concern about the birds being too young.

Current range of dates, second week of Oct. Oct. 8 to Oct. 14

Range of dates one week after waterfowl opener Oct. 5 to Oct. 11

Comparison:

| | Current 2nd Sat | 1 week after waterfowl opener |
|------|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| 2002 | Oct. 12 | Oct. 5 |
| 2003 | Oct. 11 | Oct. 11 |
| 2004 | Oct. 9 | Oct. 9 |
| 2005 | Oct. 8 | Oct. 8 |
| 2006 | Oct. 14 | Oct. 7 |
| 2007 | Oct. 13 | Oct. 6 |

As you can see next year (2003) the season will revert to the second Saturday in October. This will give time in which the impacts of this falls season (2002) can be evaluated to determine the course of action for the 2006 season, which is the next time an earlier season would occur.

The underling concern on this issue is that commercial interest have received special considerations that may effect resldent sportsmen opportunities by promoting commercial interest they feel will endanger their ability to gain free access to private land in the future.